

Cold case cards generate tips

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Four of the unsolved homicide and missing person cases featured on decks of cards given to the public and sold to inmates at state prisons have been closed.

The cards — called Louisiana Cold Case — were unveiled in March and display information about unsolved, open cases from around the state.

Each card has the picture of a murder victim or missing person along with basic information about the case.

More than 6,000 decks have been sold to state prisons for purchase by inmates, said Pam Laborde, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections communications director.

The number of decks bought by inmates was not available, but Corrections Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc said the department typically sells about 10,000 decks of cards a year to the prison population.

“With the Louisiana Cold Case Card deck, we’ve accomplished 60 percent of annual sales in just under six months,” he said. “I’m very happy with those numbers because I think it shows that our population is interested in the cases.”



LIZ CONDO/Advocate staff photo

Another 10,000 decks have been handed out to the public across the state at events such as National Crime Victims' Rights Week, said Sid Newman, executive director of Baton Rouge's Crime Stoppers.

"Hopefully, that deck will get into the right hands, and hopefully that person will pick up the phone and share what they know," Newman said.

Whether that happens, however, will be difficult to track.

"Because of the anonymity of the Crime Stoppers program, we will never know if tips are coming from the offender population or the general public and, ultimately, it doesn't matter," LeBlanc said.

"What does matter is getting information and pictures out there to both populations so we can generate tips for local law enforcement agencies that are working hard for the families of homicide victims and missing persons," he said.

So far, arrests have been made in four of the homicide and missing person cases featured on the cards.

One of those cases — a double homicide — involved two Baton Rouge men whose bodies were found inside a burning car behind the Mississippi River levee in Port Allen. Both Jamey Williams, 25, and Drexel Swayzer, 27, had been shot.

Detectives with the West Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office arrested David "Bam" Williams, 42, on March 18 after receiving Crime Stoppers tips implicating him in the shooting and burning slayings.

Williams was booked into West Baton Rouge Parish Prison on two counts of first-degree murder.

Tips sent to Crime Stoppers also led to the June arrest of four men in the Louisiana Cold Case slaying of Marcel Trudeau.

Trudeau, a Gentilly plumber, was found inside his St. Roch Avenue home Aug. 16, 2005, by firefighters responding to a fire at the man's home, New Orleans authorities have said. Trudeau had been shot and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Investigators believe robbery might have been the motive for the shooting and later arrested Carlnell Davis, 38; David Grace, 33; Marvin Hudson, 21; and Leon Parker, 37.

All four men were booked into Orleans Parish Prison on one count each of first-degree murder and aggravated burglary.

A month later, on July 21, a detective with the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff's Office booked a 39-year-old man with second-degree murder almost 12 years after the suspect's father was shot to death.

Eugene Jack Pravata Jr. is accused of killing his father with a shotgun blast on Nov. 28, 1998, authorities claim.

Eugene J. Pravata Sr., whose face graces one of the cold case cards, was 52 when he was shot and fatally wounded underneath the carport of his residence at 12403 A. Robertson Road, Tickfaw.

The other unsolved case that's featured on the Louisiana Cold Case decks of cards that has been closed is a missing person case involving 52-year-old Carl Bennett.

Bennett was last seen alive at his residence on Conti Street in New Orleans on Oct. 6, 2008. Two weeks later, Bennett's vehicle was recovered in the 6200 block of Parish Road in St. Bernard Parish.

His remains were found near his vehicle just before the cold case decks were released in March, said Darlene

Cusanza, president and chief executive officer of Crime Stoppers of Greater New Orleans. Investigators deemed Bennett's death a suicide.

"When we rolled out the Louisiana Cold Case Card deck, I said that I would be happy if one case was solved," LeBlanc said. "I'm very pleased that arrests have been made in cases involving individuals featured in three of the cards."

Newman said the decks, funded by The Louisiana Lottery Corp., will be updated as needed and additional decks could be released in the future.